

Elementary Education Network Newsletter



Welcome to the first issue of the Elementary Education Network Newsletter. This newsletter is designed to keep you informed of the latest research and practices in elementary and preschool education. Each issue will feature information on best practices. Through this newsletter and other forums, the California Elementary Education Network will provide opportunities for educators to address common issues, share promising practices, and enhance effectiveness.

This newsletter focuses on assessment issues including the development of standards-based report cards and the California Reading and Literature Project's Reading RESULTS. Teachers trained through the Reading RESULTS project report that it has focused their reading instruction on the specific skills that each student needs. This newsletter also presents a summary of the research conducted by Joseph Johnson on high performing, high-poverty schools.

I hope you will find the articles in this newsletter helpful as you work toward improving student achievement. Please visit our Web site at <www.cde.ca.gov/elementary>, which contains information on implementing standards-based education based on the two new documents that guide our work, First Class: A Guide for Early Primary Education (1999), and Elementary Makes the Grade! (2000).

Please contact me or my staff with recommendations for future issues. We welcome your comments on the newsletter and look forward to working with you to make our Network a success. Our contact information is on page 8.

*Barbara Baseggio, Manager
Elementary Networks Office*

California Elementary Education Network Launched!

Local educators in each of California's 11 regions have participated in staff development sessions focused on CDE's new preschool and elementary reform documents.



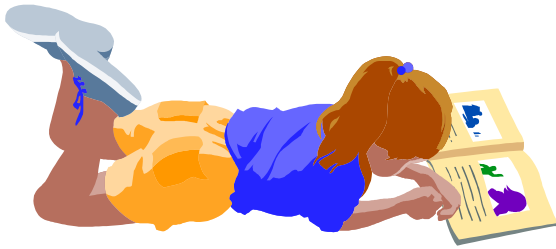
The first phase of the California Elementary Education Network has been completed with over 40 roll out institutes being held across the state focused on *First Class: A Guide for Early Primary Education* and *Elementary Makes the Grade!* The Network will provide opportunities for educators from preschools and elementary schools, after-school programs, parent and

community organizations, and colleges and universities to interact and collaborate on common issues related to implementing standards-based education.

Other forthcoming Network activities will include regional staff development sessions focused on standards-based instruction in reading and mathematics, professional book clubs, and a statewide conference that will bring together educators to share effective practices in elementary education. We will continue to update our Web site at <www.cde.ca.gov/elementary> with information on Network activities, best practices, and current research. Please e-mail us at ElemNet@cde.ca.gov so that you will automatically receive future newsletters and updates about forthcoming Network activities.

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California Reading and Literature Project's Reading RESULTS

The Elementary Networks Office became interested in learning more about the Reading RESULTS Project after visiting several California Distinguished Schools that reported they had used Reading RESULTS assessments and found them to be helpful in identifying the specific areas where students were having problems. Teachers reported that based on these assessments, they were able to focus their reading instruction clearly and specifically, resulting in greater success.

What is the Reading RESULTS Project?

Reading RESULTS, a project of the California Reading and Literature Project, is designed to bring every child to grade level, or above grade level, in reading. Reading RESULTS uses its cadre of practicing teacher-leaders to improve the reading performance of California students currently reading below grade level.

The Project instructs teachers in:

- Setting goals based on the *California Language Arts Content Standards* and the *California Reading/Language Arts Framework*,
- Assessing students' reading skills so that teachers will know which students have or have not met grade level standards,
- Working in school-site teams to look at testing data and to pool resources to meet the common goal of having all students reach the standards, and
- Using standards-based adopted instructional materials in the most effective way possible to improve student reading achievement.

The Project provides:

- An intensive period of training consistent with the *California Reading/Language Arts Framework*. The summer phase of the institute includes at least 40 hours of training.
- Assessment, instructional materials, and professional resources focused on the teaching of reading, Pre-K to grade 3.
- Training for school-site grade-level teams on how to analyze student reading assessments, critically examine instructional practices and set instructional goals.
- At least 40 hours of continuing education sessions held on Saturdays or after school during the following academic year.
- Internet-based resources that aid in the collection of data and electronic collaboration.
- A \$1,000 stipend per participant on each school team, subject to district contractual agreements and legislative approval.

Participating teachers will:

- give diagnostic assessments that are aligned with the *California Language Arts Content Standards* and that provide teachers with information about their students' critical reading skills;
- look at the results of reading assessments and set instructional goals based on this data;
- adjust classroom instruction based on daily, ongoing assessments of children's progress toward grade-level benchmarks;
- manage their classrooms and their instruction effectively;
- work with experienced teachers in grade-level teams focused on improving reading instruction; and
- celebrate steps toward results with students and each other.

Reading RESULTS developed its battery of assessments and its model of site-based teamwork in consultation with classroom teachers and reading specialists and with researchers and university educators. The project uses the practical expertise of its teacher-leaders to make Reading RESULTS work with the diversity and challenges faced by California schools.

School Selection Criteria

The Reading RESULTS project is focused on low-performing schools. Admission preference will be given to schools with:

- Reading, Language, and Spelling scores below the 40th percentile on the STAR for 2000.
- Full school teams where the majority of members are new teachers (teachers with three or fewer years' experience teaching in grades pre-K to grade 3) or under-prepared teachers (interns or teachers with emergency permits).
- Schools with high poverty levels, as determined by the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch.
- Schools with a high number of beginning or noncredentialed teachers.
- Schools that have adopted standards-based materials approved by the State Board of Education.
- Commitment to a three-year program of professional development.

State preschools are also eligible to participate as a member of a school team or separately if they are part of a state funded preschool program.

For More Information

Elementary schools and preschools interested in more information should go to the California Reading and Literature Project's Web site at <www.ucop.edu/csmp/crlp>. An Application Form for new applicants of the Reading RESULTS Project will be available from the California Reading and Literature Project at the end of February, 2001.



Designing a Standards-Based Report Card

As schools and districts align instruction and assessment to standards, they need new methods of reporting progress to parents. Many districts are developing standards-based report cards that show the level of student performance on grade-level standards.

Standards-based report cards

- Provide a clear message to parents about what their children know, what they are able to do, and what they need to learn
- Provide a reporting system that is aligned with standards-based curriculum and instruction
- Are a tool that can be used to drive instruction

Most districts have initially focused their standards-based report cards on reading and mathematics. For example, when San Juan Unified School District began developing standards-based report cards six years ago, they surveyed parents of their kindergarten through second grade students to determine what information they wanted to see on their child's report card. Parents indicated that they wanted information on their child's achievement in reading, writing, mathematics, and their behavior. They also wanted to know why students got the grade they got. In the upper grades, teachers also wanted to report student performance in science and social studies. In addition, most districts developing a standards-based report card include a section that reflects the growth and effort made by students as well as the student's work habits and social skills.

Major activities in developing a standards-based report card are to:

- ⇒ identify the priority standards to be reported
- ⇒ establish assessments that measure the priority standards
- ⇒ determine the performance levels for each standard

Standards-based report cards generally use numerical ratings to represent performance levels, such as: (1) below the grade-level standard; (2) approaching the grade-level standard; (3) proficient, at the grade-level standard; (4) advanced, above the grade-level standard.

Standards-based report cards require teachers to move from a system where they rank students within a class to a system where they need to evaluate each student's proficiency on specific standards. San Juan Unified developed district prompts, scoring rubrics, and anchor papers in writing, reading fluency, reading comprehension, and math investigations to assist teachers. Teachers then chose which district prompt they wanted to use and when they wanted to administer the assessments.

The state grade-level standards are end-of-the-year expectations. For trimester report cards, districts need to establish the expectation for each trimester. For example, where should a fourth grade student be in the area of reading comprehension and analysis at the end of the first trimester? The anchor paper for the first grading period would be different from the level expected at the end of the year.

Developing a standards-based report card takes planning and involvement by staff, parents, and board members. Pleasant Grove, a district with a single K-8 school, spent a year developing their Student Achievement Report while San Juan Unified, a large suburban school district, developed their report cards over a period of several years, pilot testing the report cards as they were developed.

The San Diego County Office of Education's Web site <www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/iss/assess/reptcard> is a useful reference for those wanting to design standards-based report cards. The site has samples of standards-based report cards including report cards for assessing the performance of students on the English language development standards in grades kindergarten through second grade and a report card in Spanish.

Tony Spears, Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment at San Diego County Office of Education indicates that districts need to become standards-based before they institute a standards-based report card. Districts need to have aligned their curriculum and instructional practices to standards, and they need to have identified performance levels.

Randy Bobby, Director of Elementary Schools, Curriculum/Categorical Programs at San Juan Unified School District, had the following advice for districts developing a standards based report card.

- "Districts need to have the buy-in by teachers and parents to support the change to standards-based report cards." "We found that parents were overwhelmingly positive about the standards-based report cards. They were getting more specific information than they had in the past", reported Bobby.
- Teachers need to have clear working definitions of curriculum and be able to reach common agreement regarding the priority standards.
- Districts need to support teachers with assessments that are linked to their priority standards.

Both Randy Bobby and Tony Spears believe that districts need to start slow in making the shift to standards-based report cards and make sure that parents are comfortable with the information they are getting.

Assessments play a pivotal role in standards-led reform, by:

- *Communicating the goals that school systems, schools, teachers, and students are expected to achieve;*
- *Providing targets for teaching and learning; and*
- *Shaping the performance of educators and students.*

—Robert L. Linn and Joan L. Herman
Standards-Led Assessment

RESEARCH ON BEST PRACTICES

Lessons Learned from Successful High-poverty Schools

Joseph Johnson (1999) in his research on successful high-poverty schools identified the following characteristics of high performing schools:

- strong focus on academic success
- a “no excuses” attitude
- careful experimentation with instruction
- involvement of all staff in student achievement
- a sense of family in the school community
- collaboration focused instruction
- passion for improvement at the school

The successful schools established clear, measurable, and challenging academic standards and benchmarks and regularly assessed student attainment toward these benchmarks. By disaggregating data, schools were able to identify groups of students that needed additional help. School decisions relating to resources and personnel were based on student achievement of standards.

These successful high-poverty schools did not accept excuses for student failure; rather they focused on how they could create an environment where all students would succeed. School staff acknowledged barriers to achievement but did not allow the barriers to become excuses. In addition, the school staff had high expectations for themselves.

In successful schools, educators were willing to experiment with new approaches. As a staff, they reviewed research and identified programs and practices that might improve student achievement of standards. When piloting new approaches they used data to determine their success.

Everyone who touched a child, in these successful schools, was considered an important part of the educational process. These schools found ways to use everyone’s talents to achieve the school’s goals. Parent involvement was emphasized. The standards were clearly explained to parents along with suggestions for assistance they could use to help their child at home.

The successful high-poverty schools created a sense of family where all members of the school community felt valued and appreciated. Students were treated with respect and the contributions of all members of the school community were acknowledged.

The successful schools provided time and a trusting environment where teacher collaboration on instructional issues was emphasized. Teachers’ came together regularly to discuss student work and continuous professional development was part of the school culture.

The successful schools acknowledged and celebrated their successes. They assumed that they could always improve even when they had achieved more than comparable schools.

Sources:

Johnson, J. 1999. “Improving Student Achievement through Standards and Accountability: Lessons Learned from Successful Schools in Texas,” *California Curriculum News Report*, Vol. 24, No. 5, pp. 6-7.

Charles A. Dana Center, University of Texas at Austin. 1999. *Hope for Urban Education: A Study of Nine High Performing, High-Poverty, Urban Elementary Schools*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Planning and Evaluation Service. <www.ed.gov/PDFDocs/urbaned.pdf>

STAR Writing Assessment

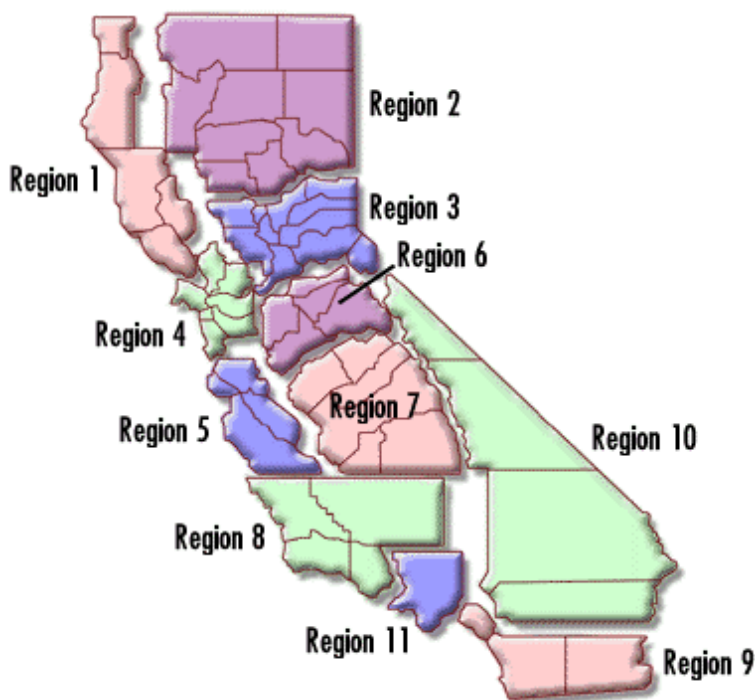
Beginning in spring 2001, students in grades 4 and 7 will be required to take a writing assessment as part of the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program. Students, in both fourth and seventh grade, will have 60 minutes of uninterrupted writing time to respond to one prompt. The prompts for each grade will address one of the genres specified in the state Writing Applications standards for the grade. In grade 4, the writing to be assessed may include narratives, responses to literature, or summaries of reading materials. Students will not be allowed to use dictionaries, thesauruses, or other aids. All planning for the writing and the final draft must be completed in the writing response booklet that will be provided. Each writing sample will be scored using a holistic rubric by at least two independent readers.

Two testing dates have been designated for the writing test: **Tuesday, March 27**, with make-up testing on March 28. Only students in schools, tracks, or programs not in session on March 27, may be tested on Tuesday, May 8, with a May 9 make-up date.

The best preparation for the writing assessment is to have students write regularly and edit their own work. The *Reading/Language Arts Framework* contains standards that describe the writing strategies, applications, and conventions for each grade level, as well as suggested teaching strategies. Teachers may also want to provide written directions for writing prompts throughout the school year and teach students to identify key words in them.

If you have any questions about the writing assessment, contact your district testing coordinator or the Standards and Assessment Division of the California Department of Education at (916) 657-3011 or e-mail at star@cde.ca.gov.

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